




Factors Driving Organic Food Purchase Among Malaysians in Klang Valley: Does Advertising Important?

Noraihan Mohamad^(✉) , Nur 'Amirah Abdul Nasir,
and Nurul Izzah Eddy Zulkarnain

School of Hospitality and Creative Arts, Management and Science University, University Drive,
Off Persiaran Olahraga, Seksyen 13, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
noraihan_mohamad@msu.edu.my

Abstract. Organic is a process of agricultural products like vegetables, meat, dairy products, fruits and grains. Organic is designed to enhance the soil and water quality, safe and healthy life, enable natural livestock behaviour, and others. Previous research has consistently stated various factors that influence people's organic food consumption. Hence, this study aims to examine the predictors of organic food buying behaviour among Malaysians. The descriptive research survey was conducted among consumers who buy organic food in Klang Valley. A total of 305 respondents were selected based on the convenience sampling technique. Pearson correlation technique analysis was employed to test the research hypothesis. The results show that price, attitude, health consciousness, and advertising have a positive relationship towards organic food buying behaviour among Malaysians. The findings indicated price, attitude, health consciousness, and advertising as the important elements to convince people to change their eating behaviour from conventional food to organic food. This study contributes to the organic food consumption body of knowledge by expanding the literature from consumers' perspectives. From the practical point of view, the findings provide important information to the service provider to improve their marketing strategies in helping people to have better eating behaviour in the future.

Keywords: Advertising · Attitude · Health Consciousness · Organic Food · Price

1 Introduction

Nowadays, demands towards organic food are significantly increased as the awareness of the risks of chemicals present in conventional food as well as pollution and environmental issues, which are increased among consumers who were interested in pure food [1–4]. Consumers' interest towards organic food products is in response to consideration of agricultural practices in producing conventional food, human health, animal welfare, and the environment [5, 6]. Undeniably, organic food is produced through a high-quality food material process of agricultural products such as vegetables, meat, dairy products, fruits and grains [7]. The process is designed to enhance the soil and water quality,

as well as safe and healthy life to encourage natural livestock behaviour. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has suggested four principles of organic agriculture, which include health, ecology, fairness and care. Relatively, organic food consumption in developing countries such as Malaysia is still new among the citizens. Thereby, information about different predictors that influence consumers' intention to repurchase organic food products in developing countries is limited [8]. However, it can be said that the demand for organic food is consistently growing as citizens become more aware and knowledgeable about health benefits and environmental issues. The increasing consumers' awareness about the benefits of eating organic food and a healthier lifestyle makes them more selective in terms of food choice [9, 10]. Apart from that, the growth of the economic sector of the country also contributes to the high demand for processed organic food products [8].

Research by Rakuten Insight revealed that the majority of Malaysian respondents show a willingness to allocate their expenses for an organic food product as it is proven safe for human health and the environment. This is due to its production process which is chemical-free, and nature-based, and the benefits of the products' ingredients itself such as quality proteins, amino acids, magnesium, iron, phosphorus and other healthy aspects compared to conventional food [10]. Previous empirical studies have steadily discussed the driving factors of organic food consumption [11–16]. Past research consistently revealed that customer's repurchase intention of organic food is influenced by factors like health consciousness, lifestyle, environmental concern, product quality, price fairness, food safety concern, trust, satisfaction, attitude, subjective norms and perceived value [1, 12, 14, 17, 18]. Despite that, advertising has also been revealed as one of the significant determinants of consumers' organic food intention to repurchase. Truthfully, advertising campaigns are needed to enhance the consumption of organic food among consumers by creating awareness of the benefits, specifically for a healthy lifestyle and saving the environment. It is worth noting that great awareness about organic food will lead to consumers' intention to repurchase greatly [4, 18]. However, many consumers are more aware of the organic meaning than organic practices. Thus, it is crucial to have an aggressive and effective advertising campaign to create not just consumers' awareness of organic foods' benefits but to encourage consumption. Ultimately, this effort is expected to affect consumers' repurchase intention and thereby increase company sales. Hence, advertising turns into a significant aspect to be discussed thoroughly when it comes to consumers' organic food repurchase intention [10]. Moreover, to create more demand towards organic food products, more research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of advertising and marketing campaigns, as well as how they can influence consumers' attitudes positively [19]. Since the literature shows some limitations, academic exploration is needed to understand more about the determinants of organic food consumption in developing countries including Malaysia. Therefore, besides price, attitude and health consciousness, this study aims to identify the relationship between advertising and organic food purchase intention among consumers in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Repurchase Intention

Purchase intention is an individual cognitive stage, which can be explained as a consumer's thinking or planning about to buy an organic food product. While repurchase intention explains consumers' buying behaviour in the future and ongoing desire to continue consuming organic food products. Marketers must identify consumers' repurchase intention as it reflects actual purchasing behaviour. In this case, people believe that organic food has a higher value than conventional food as it has natural content without any artificial ingredients or food additives. Ultimately, it will increase consumers' repurchase intention [20]. Previous studies have proposed various predictors towards consumer purchase intention of organic food including price, health consciousness, attitude and advertising [8, 14, 21, 22].

2.2 Price

Food pricing is identified as an important determinant of consumers' purchase decision-making as they are more concerned about cost savings and always do a price comparison between different vendors during the process of purchasing [25]. Organic foods are found pricier than conventional foods. The high price of organic food and financial ability are some of the challenges to creating consumers' positive attitudes as this will discourage their demand towards organic foods [21, 26]. However, consumers are willing to pay more for organic foods as their perception of their values can enhance the quality of life and be more environmentally friendly than conventional foods [4, 20]. Previous study indicates that price has an insignificant influence towards consumers' attitude toward organic food [23]. However, a recent study by [26] found that positive price perception significantly influences consumers' continued intention to purchase organic food. On the same note, respondents were willing to pay for organic food at a premium price, which higher is than conventional food as they were fully aware of and understood the benefits of organic one [4]. As a result, the following hypothesis is formed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between price and organic food repurchase intention among consumers in Klang Valley.

2.3 Attitude

Generally, different attitudes will represent different individuals' behaviour. It can be considered as an individual's evaluation of their positive or negative feelings towards an object, or concept in performing a particular behaviour [24]. In this context, consumers' positive attitudes towards organic foods will also generate positive purchasing behaviour. In regard to the organic food production process, people believe that consuming organic food products will provide them with better health; this ultimately will form their attitude and behaviour to consume organic food consistently [12, 21]. Previous studies consistently found that attitude significantly influences consumers' intention to repurchase organic food [4, 18, 22, 23, 25]. By taking this to mind, the following hypothesis was formed:

H2: There is a positive relationship between attitude and organic food repurchase intention among consumers in Klang Valley.

2.4 Health Consciousness

Health consciousness can be defined as an individual's level of concern to maintain a healthy lifestyle and achieve a desired state of well-being [22]. As consumers concern about food nutrition in their diet, health consciousness has always become an important predictor towards their behavioural intention to purchase organic foods [21, 26]. Moreover, people also believe that organic foods would help them to improve their health as it is safe and free from artificial pesticide, chemical, food additives as well as genetic modification [14, 16]. Health consciousness is consistently proven as one of the significant predictors of consumers' attitudes and repurchase behaviour of organic foods [18, 21]. However, some studies show a different result, where health consciousness has no significant effect on the intention to repurchase healthy food [8, 17]. Hence, the following hypothesis is formed:

H3: There is a positive relationship between health consciousness and organic food repurchase intention among consumers in Klang Valley.

2.5 Advertising

Advertising refers to a process of announcing a product or service by a business organisation with the main purpose of convincing particular target customers to purchase the product or service. According to [27], advertising is "the placement of announcements and persuasive messages in time or space purchased in any of the mass media by business firms, non-profit organisations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services, organisations, or ideas". Advertising is essential for businesses as it can create value for products or services. It will help businesses to form customers' perceptions by positioning their products or services in customers' minds. Both traditional and digital platforms such as social media, television, magazine, and newspaper have been recognised as significant advertising channels to influence consumers' purchase intention. In this Internet era, advertising through digital channels become important for marketers to promote products and services. Digital advertising is seen as one of the marketing communications strategies made by marketers to increase sales of products and services using an online platform such as social media ads, email marketing, search engine marketing and so on [26, 27].

Food advertising is commonly identified as one of the significant predictors towards consumers' purchase behaviour [10]. Advertising, which also refers to as a marketing communications tool also plays an important role in enhancing consumers' awareness about the advantages of organic food as well as healthy food [23, 28]. It is worth noting that consumers' intention to purchase organic food products is mostly influenced by reliable advertisements [29]. Moreover, the role of advertising including digital advertising and electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) towards consumers' purchase intention has been discussed thoroughly by previous studies [8, 26, 30]. EWOM refers to consumers' sharing activities about certain information or experiences on online platforms

such as social networking sites [31]. The literature review indicated that eWOM is a powerful advertising tool for marketers to reach the target customers and has a positive effect on customers' repurchase intention [32]. A previous study also shows that advertising through sales promotion has a significant influence on consumers' attitudes towards organic food [23]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: There is a positive relationship between advertising and organic food repurchase intention among consumers in Klang Valley.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the predictors of price, attitude, health consciousness, and advertising on consumers' organic food repurchase intention.

3 Methodology

A cross-sectional design was conducted to investigate the effect of price, attitude, health consciousness and advertising on consumers' organic food consumption. Based on the research design, the group of respondents were accessed once during the data collection. Through the convenience sampling technique, a total of 305 respondents among the Malaysian public in Klang Valley were accessed using an online self-administered questionnaire. A Pearson Correlation coefficient technique in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was employed to test the research hypotheses. As suggested by [33], a sample size of 100–200 respondents is considered appropriate for a very large or unknown population. Therefore, 305 respondents for this study are acceptable for further analysis. Additionally, [34] mentioned that a minimum sample size of 200 is required for Pearson Correlation technique analysis.

The research instrument consists of two sections; Section A demonstrated the profile demographic of respondents and other questions that will be analysed descriptively through frequency and percentage, while Section B contained constructs to evaluate the price, attitude, health consciousness and advertising on consumer's organic food

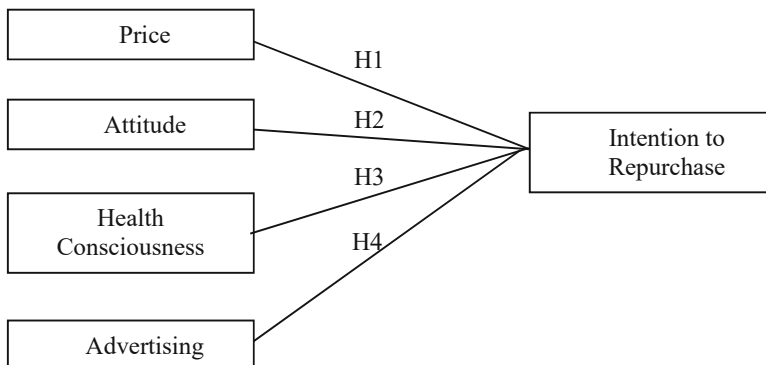


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

consumption, which measured through a five-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The price construct was measured using seven items adapted from [20, 27, 29]. Attitude construct was measured using eight items adapted from [7, 23]. The health consciousness construct was measured using nine items adapted from [12, 23, 35]. The advertising construct was measured using five items adapted from [23]. Lastly, buying behaviour construct was measured using six items adapted from [23, 35]. A reliability test was conducted on 50 Malaysian public to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire [36]. To avoid bias, all the data obtained for the reliability test are excluded from the sample data. The results show that all items for each variable are reliable based on the Cronbach alpha coefficient value more than 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.70$), which are price ($\alpha = 0.701$), attitude ($\alpha = 0.889$), health consciousness ($\alpha = 0.926$), advertising ($\alpha = 0.815$) and buying purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.878$).

3.1 Profile Demographic

The analysis of the respondents' profile demographic revealed that 60.3% of the respondents were female and 39.7% were male. The majority of the respondents fell under the age group of 21–25 years old (41.3%), followed by 41 years old and above (34.1%) and only 2.6% of the respondents fell under the age group of 36–40 years old. Moreover, most of the respondents were Malay (77.4%), while 13.1% of the respondents were Chinese, 4.9% were Indian, and 4.6% of the respondents were Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak. In terms of religion, most of the respondents are Islam (83.3%), followed by Buddha (10.5%), Hindu (3.3%) and Christian (3.0%). Analysis of educational background found that the majority of respondents attained a bachelor's degree (55.4%), followed by 17.4% who attained a diploma, 11.5% of the respondents were master's degree graduates, and only 2.6% of the respondents attained a PhD degree. Finally, most of the respondents were employees in the private sector (41.6%), followed by employees in the public sector (29.5%), and self-employment (28.8%).

3.2 Organic Food Consumption

The findings revealed that most respondents buy organic food once a month (34.8%), followed by 1 to 2 times a week (24.3%), and 2 to 3 times a month (21.6%). In terms of respondents' choice of organic food, most of the respondents choose to buy organic fruits (76.4%), followed by vegetables (71.5%), eggs (41.6%), cereal products (37.4%), dairy products (34.4%), and bakery products (26.2%). The analysis also showed that 59.7% of respondents buy fewer organic food products compared to the previous year. 21.3% of respondents buy organic food as the previous year. Only 19% of respondents buy organic food more than the previous year. This result indicated that in the past, most respondents were aware of the benefits of organic food on their health and decided to consume it on daily basis. However, as posited by [15] price has a significant impact on a customer's decision to purchase. Undoubtedly, the high price of organic products could be one of the barriers to customers' consumption and their loyalty towards the type of food. In other words, an individual's economic status plays an important role in determining organic food consumption. This view is relevant since this study was conducted in 2020 when the economic status of most people was affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. Hence,

organic food consumption for most of the respondents is found less than the previous year. Apart from that, besides of pricey factor (43%), most respondents are found not choosing organic food because of i) limited choice provided by the seller nearest to them (26.9%), ii) products needed unavailable (13.8%), iii) lack information about the benefits and quality of organic food (17.7%), iv) prefer conventional food (12.5%), and v) not interested to consume organic food (14.1%).

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

The Pearson Correlation analysis technique was employed for the research hypotheses. First, the analysis has indicated that price has a positive relationship with customers' organic food purchase intention ($r = 0.456$, $n = 305$, $p < 0.05$). The result is supported by previous studies which also found that price has a positive and significant relationship with customers' buying behaviour [28]. Additionally, these previous studies have also confirmed that price plays an important role in determining consumers' decision to purchase organic food. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. Second, the analysis has found that attitude has a strong positive relationship with customers' organic food purchase intention ($r = 0.538$, $n = 305$, $p < 0.05$). According to [22], customers who have confidence in organic food's quality and are aware of its benefit to their health will have a positive perception towards organic food and tend to purchase the product for themselves. It is also supported by [37] who mentioned that consumers with a positive attitude towards organic food will also have positive purchase behaviour. Besides, [16] stated that the important key driving factor towards customers' attitude toward organic food is customers' concern about their health and the quality of food. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Third, health consciousness is proven to have a positive relationship with customers' organic food purchase intention ($r = 0.410$, $n = 305$, $p < 0.5$). This result supports the findings by [22], which found consumers who are conscious of their health tend to consume organic foods as they believed in their quality and good impact on individual's health. Similarly, other studies have mentioned that health consciousness provides a significant impact on customers' buying behaviour on organic food because of their awareness of chronic diseases due to eating habits such as diabetes and coronary disease [38]. They believe that the only way to prevent themselves from this kind of disease is to be mindful of their food intake. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is accepted. Fourth, the research finding indicated that advertising has a strong positive relationship with customers' organic food purchase intention ($r = 0.551$, $n = 305$, $p < 0.5$). This result explained that advertising through numerous platforms of media particularly online media plays an important role to create consumers' awareness about organic food, thus convincing them to purchase and consume it in their daily diet. It is essential to develop customers' trust in the quality of organic food, not only to increase consumption but to reduce the sentiment of the price too. Referring to the literature, advertising and marketing strategy is essential for marketers especially in convincing customers' purchase behaviour as it can create awareness and educate customers about a product or service [26, 29, 30, 32]. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

4 Discussion

The main objective of this study is to investigate the predictors that determine the consumers' intention in a developing country, Malaysia to purchase organic food products. Four predictors have been analysed and the findings revealed that price, attitude, health consciousness well as advertising have a positive relationship with customers' repurchase intention of organic food products. Empirical results indicated that advertising becomes the strongest predictor in the relationship towards customers' repurchase intention of organic food products. The result of this study has validated the previous study in which advertising has a significant effect on consumers' buying decisions of organic food and health products [10, 28]. Logically, the more consumers are involved with an advertisement about organic food products, the higher their awareness about the benefits of organic food on their health and environment. Ultimately, it will influence consumers' perception and thus increase their intention to purchase organic food products. Similarly, a study by [3] has revealed the role of advertising media in influencing consumer's purchase intention, where trust towards information disseminated on media has a strong influence on consumer's purchase behaviour.

The results suggest that it is important for marketers and retailers to explore the interactive characteristics of new media particularly social media as they are the most significant channels to disseminate information and facts about organic food products to consumers. Apart from that, attitude also plays an important role in determining consumers' purchase intention of organic foods. Moreover, the analysis also revealed that Malaysian consumers have a strong concern about their health, and this has influenced their intention to purchase organic food. Consumers believe that organic food products have high value than conventional food products in many aspects including nutritional, safety, quality, environmental benefits and health benefits, making them have a high intention to consume organic food products. In terms of price, this study found that price has a positive relationship with customers' purchase intention. The previous study mentioned that high prices will reduce consumers' purchase intention [23]. However, due to the premium benefits of organic foods, consumers are also willing to pay more [4, 39].

5 Implications, Limitations and Future Research

Based on the research findings, this study proposes the following practical implications that might be useful to the marketers of organic food products in Malaysia. To begin, marketers might take an initiative to implement marketing campaigns aggressively as part of strategies to educate consumers about organic food products and encourage them to increase their consumption. An aggressive educational campaign is essential as it can build consumers' trust in the benefits of organic food products on their health and environment. Moreover, in this digital era, a significant platform such as social media plays an important role in creating consumer awareness, trust and a better attitude towards organic food products. Next, there is also a suggestion to reduce the high price of organic food price in the Malaysian market [14]. This suggestion is valid to be considered as it will affect consumers purchasing power. In the case of Malaysia, the high price of organic

food is due to the high dependence of organic food production on imported products than local products [38]. Hence, the Malaysian authority bodies need to plan properly and consider being one of the countries that actively produce organic food products for the local and international markets.

It is worth saying that a high volume of organic food production will reduce the price and at the same time will enhance consumers purchasing power. Apart from the importance of managerial implications, this study faces several limitations. First, various factors can be analysed as determinants of consumers' purchase intention of organic foods. Nevertheless, this study only focused on four predictors, namely price, attitude, health consciousness and advertising with the only area of study situated in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Hence, future research is suggested to investigate other relevant predictors towards consumers' purchase intention on organic food products. Future studies are also encouraged to focus on different angle studies so that the findings can be compared with findings from this study. Next, this study is limited to consumers of organic food in general. As Malaysia is a multiracial country with a lot of demographic variations, there is a need to study organic food purchases from different socio-demographic points of view such as gender, age, education, occupation, income and so on.

Finally, basic technical analysis which is Pearson correlation was applied in this study to identify the relationship between variables. This analysis is limited to the relationship between variables but not in terms of the effect of the predictors. Because of that, advanced technique analysis especially multivariate technique analysis such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) by using SmartPLS, AMOS or MPlus software is strongly encouraged to use. This technique is believed to be able to provide a deep understanding of organic food product purchases in developing countries and thus, the impact of each predictor can be thoroughly discussed from a different point of view. On the same note, the analysis of consumers' socio-demographics also can be simplified and generalised.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has revealed that consumers' intention to purchase organic food products is contributed by four main factors which are price, health consciousness, attitude and advertising. The research findings have provided significant insight to important parties such as manufacturers, retailers and marketers to understand more about the relevant motivational factors that influence consumers in Malaysia to purchase organic food products. It would help the authorities as well as industry players in planning and developing marketing strategies. It is important as organic food provides more premium benefits to an individual's health and environment than conventional food.

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